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Daily Report

Near East & South Asia

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Daily Report
Near East & South Asia

CONTENTS

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Algeria

Boudiaf Defends Dissolution of FIS

LD0503072192 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic 0600 GMT 5 Mar 92

[Text] The second part of the interview given by Mr. Mohamed Boudiaf, chairman of the Higher State Council, to AL-SALAM was published this morning.

As for the recent cabinet reshuffle, Mr. Boudiaf said that it did not reflect the expected change that would begin with the Constitution and encompass methods of government and other fields. He added that the comprehensive change is the fruit of a methodical action based on accurate information and a sufficient knowledge of the situation and the men [in charge]. Such a change cannot be achieved with haste and improvisation.

Concerning the dissolution of the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS], Mr. Mohamed Boudiaf said that dialogue was not possible with it because it started to believe that it was the authority. The investigations of detainees will continue, Mr. Boudiaf added, and all those who are found innocent will be released soon.

As for economic plans, Mr. Boudiaf said that they essentially responded to circumstantial needs such as supplies of goods, construction, and employment. Therefore, he added, these are transitional plans.

Finally, Mr. Boudiaf indicated that the national rally [national coalition government proposed by Boudiaf] was first of all an appeal to the youth and to all those who care about Algeria's future, and that it might be announced after the blessed month of Ramadan.

Prosecutor on Possibility of Appeal

LD0403215492 Algiers ENTV Television Network in Arabic 1900 GMT 4 Mar 92

[Text] The administrative chamber of the Algiers court today announced the dissolution of the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS], which since 9 February has been subjected to the suspension and dissolution measure that the Interior Ministry lodged with the administrative chamber. Here is our correspondent Ahmed Migerch:

[Migerch] At 1315 today the administrative chamber of the Algiers court handed down its verdict dissolving the FIS after having examined the case lodged by the Interior Ministry. We asked the Algiers prosecutor general about this verdict. He replied:

[Begin recording] [Unidentified prosecutor] In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful. The administrative chamber announced at today's public session its acceptance of the complaint lodged by the Interior Ministry and ordered the dissolution of the political society known as the FIS. The FIS will be notified of this verdict immediately when the decree is signed.

[Migerch] Is there a specific set time for the notification?

[Prosecutor] No, the notification is carried out immediately. It will [illegible] judges. It will then immediately be [illegible] parties concerned, the FIS and the Interior Ministry.

[Migerch] Is this ruling considered final, or does the FIS have the right to appeal? If it can appeal, who will consider the appeal?

[Prosecutor] The verdict has been issued by the administrative chamber. It can be appealed as can all verdicts, according to Clause 2 of Article 45 of the law on political societies. The party which the verdict is issued against can appeal to the administrative chamber of the Supreme Court.

[Migerch] What period of time is permitted for this? When can they appeal?

[Prosecutor] The FIS can appeal against this verdict to the Supreme Court as soon as it is informed of this verdict. The Supreme Court has one month to look into the appeal. [end recording]

FIS To Appeal Dissolution

LD0503180892 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in French 0700 GMT 5 Mar 92

[Excerpts] After legally existing for 29 months the FIS has been dissolved. [passage omitted]

The FIS' lawyers have decided to lodge an appeal, and Counselor 'Ali Yahya Abdennour, one of the FIS' lawyers, has confirmed this. The FIS has a week to lodge its appeal with the Supreme Court, which in turn has a month to issue a ruling on the appeal. When contacted by Channel 1, Counselor 'Ali Yahya Abdennour emphasized that the FIS' lawyers want to resolve this matter politically because the country needs stability and the participation of all citizens in the construction process to overcome the economic crisis. According to Counselor 'Ali Yahya Abdennour the dissolution of the FIS might have negative consequences if the party carries out its activities in secret. [passage omitted]

Foreign Minister on 'Threat'

NC0603211292 London MBC Television in Arabic 1800 GMT 4 Mar 92

[Text] MBC has asked Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi about the threat made by the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS] to escalate violence following the court's decision to dissolve it. He was also asked to give his opinion on the announcement by King Fahd Bin-'Abd-al-'Aziz, custodian of the two holy mosques, concerning the formation of a consultative council in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He said:

[Begin Brahimi recording] I have not seen the text of the FIS statement, but if they say escalation, it means that they admit to having used violence. If they used the term escalation, this means that they admit to having used violence. I cannot understand how a party that admits to

[illegible] violence can demand but he [illegible] This is very strange. The role of the master is the Minister to refer the matter to the judiciary. Is the purpose of Nigerian law to have people, corrupters, killed in the streets? This is the question that was asked of the law, and the law will answer it.

In fact, we have been expecting this announcement by King Fahd for some time now. We know that King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz, custodian of the two holy mosques, has been working on and contemplating this issue for a long time and that intensive and thorough consultations were held on the subject. We received with extreme interest to the announcement made by the custodian of the two holy mosques, and we watched part of it on BBC. All we can say is that we congratulate the custodian of the two holy mosques on this turn in the history of the Kingdom and we wish him and the fraternal people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia success. We hope this will be a step toward the progress, the continuous progress, that the Kingdom has been making. [end recording]

Views Desire for Democracy

96 0803/1/0602 Ijumpin WBC Television in Arabic 2000 GMT 6 May 96

[Interview with Foreign Minister Ladoke Bashum by correspondent Sa'd al-Shami in Nigeria; date not given—recorded]

[Excerpts] [Passage omitted] [al-Shami] The major concern of the Nigerian people is the [words indistinct] in Nigeria the return to the one-party system. What are the political prospects and the future of democracy in Nigeria?

[Bashum] I have said more than once that there is a real, wide-scale, comprehensive, and deep consensus to build a society based on pluralism, democracy, and an economy that combines both the public and private sectors, a free economy. There is a consensus on this. Almost everybody—the old and the young, the religious and the nonreligious, the rightist and leftist—agrees on this. Women, men, and those living in the forests, the city, or the desert all genuinely agree that this is what we want. Accordingly, there is no fear of turning back in this connection.

We have to admit that we have made mistakes in laying down the foundations for this pluralistic and democratic life. These mistakes led us to the brink of civil war. We have to admit these mistakes and work together through a dialogue with everyone to lay down the foundations that will enable us to exercise this democracy by maximizing the consensus. This is what we are calling for right now. The process must begin by ensuring security and stability, ensuring the people and ensuring respect for the state. It would be impossible to establish democracy in a state of anarchy or disruption. This is my reply to your question.

[al-Shami] Some are trying to use the issue of human rights violations in Nigeria. What is your view on this?

[Bashum] Economic affairs have been and will be used to avoid harming a man unless he commits a flagrant and proven crime against his [illegible] The judiciary is playing its role fully, and I moreover will forward any reference to the judiciary. The emergency law does not and must not evade, obstruct, and circumvent [illegible] incredible and unacceptable [word illegible] by America, by Americans, and by France if this event occurs in Nigeria or in any other country. The behavior that took place in Nigeria [illegible] that all control has been lost. This is taken to safeguard people's rights. Of course there were many errors, but care has been taken not to allow anyone unless he breaks the law. The ground rule's rights are respected—there is no torture, beating, punishment, or assault—and we can see [illegible] through a lawyer and defend himself to prove that he [illegible] is innocent by all means available to him.

[al-Shami] So there are things we believe do not [illegible] Western [illegible] and rights in countries that have tried to create pattern [word illegible] in Nigeria as you said?

[Bashum] Certainly. There are certain [illegible] some human groups, even some economic and foreign circles. This is [illegible] certain fact that I am always ready to be accused of such matters. I do not accept anyone [illegible] but as we have some foreign parties have taken certain steps that make me consider them against the interests, conscience, and plans we call [illegible] Nigeria for the simple fact that it is [illegible] in the entire region. We must be accurate and not accept anyone and we can [illegible]

All right. We will move a country. We first go to [illegible] to your mind when you asked our question first. The problem is has been answered [illegible] we could accept. They took steps and initiated [illegible] we could accept. We call for human brothers but for us to be a proper name. The leaders [illegible] continue to speak make the same call or statements from one to time, but they are also [illegible] or official messages calling on the [illegible] or citizens to go back and live in or visit a country. We express the very good intentions and accept [illegible] positively. There is a time for everything. [passage omitted]

[al-Shami] As the days, will the coups and the future of democracy remain as they are now? Will there be a parliament, a constitutional council?

[Bashum] Of course. These measures are temporary and we took them following the president's [illegible] and the ruling [illegible] council. We took it even as soon as we could to a constitutional and legal situation. So as soon as [illegible] to a fully constituted situation as soon as circumstances allow. We will see how the state council has been appointed for a period so as to decide the remaining [illegible] of Abacha [illegible] which I believe is not easy. That is the time when [illegible]

[illegible]

Applied Reaction to PID Modulation

Gas Bulk Collective Measure

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[illegible]

Climatic Group Formula Other Reaction

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Gaseous Ultimate Pressure Gas

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Gaseous of Religious Positive Liquid

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PID Gas Vol of Bubble

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الفهرس

الموضوع ..... الصفحة

مقدمة ١

الفصل الأول: الإطار النظري للدراسة ٥

المبحث الأول: مفهوم الدراسة وأهميتها ٥

المبحث الثاني: أهداف الدراسة ومنهجيتها ١٢

الفصل الثاني: الدراسات السابقة ١٨

المبحث الأول: الدراسات العربية ١٨

المبحث الثاني: الدراسات الأجنبية ٢٦

الفصل الثالث: الإجراءات الميدانية ٣٤

المبحث الأول: مجتمع الدراسة وعينتها ٣٤

المبحث الثاني: أداة الدراسة وصدقها وثباتها ٤١

الفصل الرابع: عرض النتائج ومناقشتها ٤٩

المبحث الأول: نتائج الإجابة عن السؤال الأول ٤٩

المبحث الثاني: نتائج الإجابة عن السؤال الثاني ٥٦

المبحث الثالث: نتائج الإجابة عن السؤال الثالث ٦٣

الفصل الخامس: النتائج والتوصيات ٧٠

المبحث الأول: ملخص النتائج ٧٠

المبحث الثاني: التوصيات والمقترحات ٧٧

المراجع ٨٤

الملاحق ٩٦

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

[illegible]

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He said: If one of the Iraqi women in a certain quarter has a sewing machine and sews in two days what her children need, there will still be another 28 days without work. Here I hope there will be cooperation in this quarter as was the case in quarters in the past.

In the past women used to go to other women who owned a sewing machine and ask permission to sew their children's clothes with it. In this case the blockade will erode their work [the work of those who imposed the blockade], not Iraq's work, after they have deprived a large number of their companies of working in Iraq and after they have deprived the market of Iraqi oil and other products. From the human point of view they are exposed more and more, day after day. Will you do this, God willing?

In conclusion, his excellency said: May God bless the non-Arab women who were with you on board of Ibn-Khaldun. I hail them three times, and may God bless the Arab women twice and the Iraqi women one time. Each case has its own merits. We always pin great hope on humanism, even inside American society, which is best represented by Ramsey Clark.

May God bless humanism in France and those who represented it through all their good stands, including the French defense minister who resigned when they decided to launch the aggression, because he found that France's position conflicted not only with his beliefs but also with French national interests after France turned into a lackey of U.S. policy.

May God bless humanity everywhere in the East and the West. May God bless the nation every time it expresses the spirit of the message that it is carrying as a permanent duty and a great honor. May God bless you.

Saddam Chairs RCC Meeting, Husayn Hasan Attends

JN0403154792 Baghdad Republic of Iraq Radio Network in Arabic 1500 GMT 4 Mar 92

[Text] Leader President Saddam Husayn chaired a meeting of the Revolution Command Council [RCC] yesterday. Hasan Hamdan al-'Azzawi, head of the Presidential Office, and Staff Lieutenant General Husayn Kamil Hasan, adviser to his excellency the president, attended the meeting.

IRNA Reports Turkish Air Strike Kills 12 Kurds

LD0403194692 Tehran IRNA in English 1836 GMT 4 Mar 92

[All place-names as received]

[Text] Orumae (West Azerbaijan), March 4, IRNA—Seven fighter bombers of the Turkish Air Force launched air raids in northern Iraq killing 12 women and children and injuring five in Kashk village in Seyedkan region, Kurdish populated Diarbakr Province during the past two days.

Iraq's Kurdistan Democratic Party forwarded a statement to IRNA here today, quoting the governor general of Turkey's Diyarbakr Province as having said that the raids were carried out two times Sunday afternoon March 1, against the villages.

The raids caused vast destruction in the villages of Ayesh, Kashk, Meshidebian, Khushkan, Vishah, Bovan, Likan, Deshte Hirat and Seyedkan.

The statement said that the people of the villages deserted their homes fleeing to the mountains.

In a similar operation last August Turkey said the purpose of its attack was to destroy what it called the bases of the Turkish "Kurdish Workers' Party" in northern Iraq.

IAEA Report Cites Iraq's 'Complete Cooperation'

JN0503194692 Baghdad Republic of Iraq Radio Network in Arabic 0400 GMT 5 Mar 92

[Text] The International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] has officially confirmed that the 10th nuclear inspection team has not found any evidence of new activities related to Iraq's nuclear program.

INA's New York correspondent cites an official IAEA report sent yesterday by the UN secretary general to the Security Council as stating that Iraq is interested in turning a new page and that the Iraqi parties were very cooperative throughout the inspection.

The 10th inspection team, which was led by Professor Maurizio Zifferero, head of the IAEA inspection, visited Iraq between 5 and 13 February and inspected various Iraqi installations, including the al-Mawsil Central Prison.

The IAEA report adds that a thorough search by the 10th team did not reveal any underground nuclear reactor facility to produce plutonium and that the information and documents collected by the team do not support the UN special committee's reports which allege that such an underground facility exists.

The IAEA also confirms that search of the new sites specified by the special committee did not produce any evidence of the presence of clandestine nuclear activities.

It is known that the UN special committee, which is headed by Rolf Ekeus, relies in its fabrications against Iraq on intelligence reports supplied primarily by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

The IAEA's report says that full advantage must be taken of Iraq's offer, which is based on adopting a course of complete cooperation.

The report adds that after 10 inspection missions, surveys of Iraq's efforts in the nuclear field have led to the formation of a solid and consistent picture and that only minor details remain.

The report says the visit by the USA team to the Bathaa cement factory confirmed that the factory is only a cement factory which openly operates and whose documentation is being produced.

The IAEA adds that the visit to the facilities of the enterprise entrusted with rebuilding al-Mathnā' confirmed that there were no suspicious components there, that the site was merely a warehouse used to store iron, and that it is similar to any warehouse in any other country.

Iraqi Airways Asks UN Approval for Human Flights

[FOOTLINE] Baghdad INA in Arabic 0730 GMT 2 May 02

[Text] Baghdad, 2 May (INA)—Iraq has asked the UN Security Council's sanctions committee to allow it to reopen its airspace between Baghdad and Amman.

The INA, newspaper cites Engineer Sufyān-Dīn Sāli, Iraqi airways director general, as saying that Iraq airways will operate two flying [illegible] flights daily between the two capitals.

The request, which was submitted via the Foreign Ministry, also asks for approval to resume domestic flights between Baghdad and al-Mawsil.

Religious Gatherings Reportedly Banned in al-Najaf

[FOOTLINE] Tehran IRIB Television First Program Network in Persian 2130 GMT 4 May 02

[Excerpt] With the start of the holy month of Ramadan, Iraqi forces with military equipment have taken up positions in the holy city of al-Najaf in order to confront popular movements.

Announcing the news today, a source close to Saddam's opponents told an IRNA correspondent that in the holy city of al-Najaf, mosque doors are closed to the people, and any mourning service or visits to martyrs graves—martyrdom attained during the confrontation involving al-Najaf citizens against Saddam—is banned.

In other Iraqi religious cities, including Karbala', the situation is the same. People are banned from holding religious gatherings, attending mosques, or visiting martyrs graves.

The source added: The Iraqi regime recently started deploying several antiaircraft weapons and ground-to-ground missiles between Karbala' and an-Najaf [passage omitted]

Opposition Reports Attacks on Regime Officials

[FOOTLINE] Al-Sharqiyah Voice of the Iraqi People in Arabic 1330 GMT 3 May 02

[Text] Sources in the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq [SAIRI] have reported the escalation of popular forces operations and more [illegible] shooting the [illegible] regime.

The source said that revolutionaries were able to kill a number of criminals in the [illegible] security service in the al-Dawrah area, the [illegible] area, and television [illegible] area in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. The [illegible] were also executed in Baghdad's [illegible] quarter.

In al-Basrah, the people's forces have killed a number of criminals of the [illegible] security service, including a security commander. Another popular group carried out [illegible] in al-Najaf city and killed two officials of the ruling party, who had been active with following up the implementation of plans devised by the [illegible] criminal Uday Sadam Husayn al-Takrit, during his recent trip to the city.

Another group in al-Hillah, a suburb of al-Samawah city, liquidated a security commissioner whose job was to monitor and harass the public.

SAIRI Chairman Comments on Saudi Arabia Visit

Iranian Public 'Successful'

NC [2001/05/02] Clandestine Voice of the Iraqi People in Arabic 1500 GMT 2 May 02

[Text] Sayyid Muhammad Bāqir al-Hakīm, chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq [SAIRI], has said that the aim of his delegation's visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was to discuss ideas on political and [illegible] programs and coordination between neighboring countries.

He added that his talks with Saudi officials were successful and resulted in a good understanding.

The SAIRI chairman said in an interview that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is deeply concerned in the Iraqi people and their regime and sufferings. He added that King Fahd has promised to devote more attention to helping the Iraqi people both regionally and internationally.

In reply to a question on the political program that was discussed, Sayyid al-Hakīm said: This program was prepared eight months ago but its submission was delayed because we wanted it to be one that we proposed with realism. We must establish relations with our neighbors on regional issues so that we can implement this program. Those ideas have been accepted at the regional level and we have received assurances of non-intervention in Iraq's internal affairs and of concern for protecting Iraq's independence.

The SAIRI chairman replied in the affirmative to the talks with a number of Iraqi opposition figures residing in Saudi Arabia and said those talks revolved [illegible] around. He said: We exchanged ideas and views on the basic issues proposed by the political and other programs, and on trying to adopt the issues of those meeting [illegible] ideas.

[illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

like a beast of prey upon them, eating up their food. There are two categories of people: Brothers-in-religion and brothers-in-creation." Islamic logic not excluding, speaks of a common denominator, which is religion, or humanity.

[AL-SAFIR] But the Christian does not want this to be a favor. This is his right, and it is recorded in history. He wants real powersharing. Pluralism must be respected. The Christian does not want a covenant; this was attempted during the Fatimids [Islamic dynasty ruling parts of Arab world between 10th and 12th centuries], and you know what happened.

[Nasrallah] Islam must not be tried on the basis of the Fatimids or the Mamluks. Look at what the Mamluks did to the Shiites in Jubayl and Kasrawan. No, you must not judge on this basis. It seems, judging by what we hear now, as if Muslims are required to recognize Christians and their right to share power. This is not the question. The problem was that the Muslims were demanding their right to share power. Some Christian leaders responded, and others split hairs when it came to Christian privileges. If we reach the point where Lebanon is a country for all Lebanese, and if we decide to live together in this country, let us see who will truly represent the people. Let them debate and find a formula for ruling this country.

Shiite Official on Gulf War, Internal Politics

NC0203134892 Tehran KEYHAN in Persian
12 Feb 92 p 16

["Exclusive" interview with Muhammad Shams-al-Din, deputy chairman of the Higher Islamic Shiite Council, by unidentified KEYHAN correspondent; date, place not given]

[Excerpts] [KEYHAN] Even though more than a year has passed since the Persian Gulf war, its impact and consequences are still being felt on various levels, particularly on the Islamic political scene, which is marked by extensive unrest. What is Your Excellency's assessment of the reasons and factors behind the Iraqi regime's aggression against Kuwait?

[Shams-al-Din] In the name of God, the almighty, the merciful. If we want to carefully assess this issue, we should accept the fact that Iraq's aggression against Kuwait was a trap set by imperialism for the Islamic ummah, and an act that was carried out by one of imperialism's puppets, both knowingly and out of ignorance. [passage omitted]

One of the major consequences of the wretched second Persian Gulf war was that it harmed the Arab position. It caused the disintegration of Muslim Arab strength. It revealed the weakness of what is known as Arab solidarity, and the many weak points in the world Islamic movement. I always stress the need to avoid such weakness. During Iraq's war against Iran, the world Islamic movement did not clearly define the aggressor or those attacked; some factions in the Islamic movement remained silent, while others supported the aggressor. [passage omitted]

[KEYHAN] How do you assess the future of the Muslim-inhabited republics of the former Soviet Union? How should this issue be approached?

[Shams-al-Din] [passage omitted] Two phenomena can clearly be seen in the Muslim republics of Russia [as published]. The first is that people and human societies have been able to regain their freedom and their right to think, to choose, to accept, or to reject things and they can decide on the basis of their interests. The second phenomena is the freedom of faith and the fact that pious people have acquired religious freedoms. The people in these republics have deep Islamic roots and they played a considerable role in the propagation and expansion of Islamic civilization and culture.

Great scholars were on this territory, and they played a great role in propagating such rich Islamic traditions as the Koranic sciences, Islamic tradition, interpretation, Islamic jurisprudence, language and culture, and other principles and sciences, such as philosophy, medicine, astrology, geography, geometry, and other sciences. The Muslim-inhabited areas in the former Soviet Union constitute a profound historic and geographic center of the world of Islam, and historic personalities in this area have played a great role in propagating Islamic culture and civilization. The Muslim nations in this area regaining their freedom of belief and the freedom of Islamic belief is a great victory for all Muslims. [passage omitted]

[KEYHAN] Now that the Muslim-inhabited republics north of Iran have gained their independence and freedom, we see how countries far and near are trying to exploit the situation... [ellipsis as published]

[Shams-al-Din] As I have said, the country that is closest to the newly independent republics, both historically and as far as human relations are concerned, is the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have also pointed out these republics should be approached with respect, and understanding for the special conditions and characteristic of the people. [passage omitted]

[KEYHAN] I have a question on the Middle East peace conference. In view of Israel's uncompromising and inflexible stand, will the Arabs be able to regain the territories Israel occupied in 1967?

[Shams-al-Din] We cannot actually go into detail, and apparently you want us to go into detail. Doing so would imply accepting the principle of the peace conference, and we have stated our views and position on the peace conference in a jurisprudential and political statement, in which we referred to an equation on the Arabic stances that we named "the needs of governments and the desires of the ummah." [passage omitted]

[illegible]

[illegible] Mr. Shams al-Din, please allow us to move on to the Lebanese scene and to study the current situation in Lebanon, especially since the al-Ta'if Accord.

[Shams al-Din] The situation in Lebanon has improved. As far as security is concerned, we have been able to achieve important results, including ending Lebanon's civil war. Concerning public order and stabilizing the situation in the country, the government has been able to resume its activities, and has been able to end the chaotic situation up to a certain point. There is still a long way to go until chaos is completely overcome, and as far as delineating the geography and people is concerned, Lebanon's political situation calls for implementation of a new constitution, compiled on the basis of national solidarity documents from the al-Ta'if conference. This has brought about an important development in Lebanon's political system, and we can say that this constitution is fairer than the previous one, even though it has not met all the wishes and needs of Muslims as far as establishing a balanced system is concerned. [passage omitted]

[KEYSTONE] In view of your vital responsibility as vice chairman of the Higher Islamic Shiite Council of Lebanon, how do you see the future of the Lebanese Shiites?

[Shams al-Din] We are moving on the basis of a strategic and basic outlook in Lebanon, and our movement does not belong exclusively to the Shiite sect. Moreover, in our movement, we hope to unite the views of all Lebanese Muslims, so that we can adopt common stances on fundamental problems and our future. We thank God for helping us take considerable steps.

In this discussion, I deem it necessary to refer to one point, and that is that the general situation of Lebanese Shiite Muslims has improved, especially as far as participation in the government, Lebanese rule, and shouldering heavy responsibilities such as unity and concordance among Shiites are concerned. In the past, some crises emerged in the Shiite sect. Today, with God's help, we have overcome them and there are no signs of crisis now. We have Iran and Syria to thank for this. Therefore, we can say that the situation of the Lebanese Shiites has improved, as demonstrated by their active participation in political affairs.

Of course, there are still complaints, but this is only natural. When have you ever known life to be without problems? It is only natural for life to be full of problems and complications.

[KEYSTONE] We have heard reports recently on parliamentary elections in Lebanon, and it is said that a date has been set. As far as these elections are concerned, some prominent Islamic personalities have pointed out the need for Islamic forces to participate. What is your opinion?

[Shams al-Din] One of the basic wishes of the people is that parliamentary elections be held to implement the new Lebanese political system, which is the outcome of recent political developments here. The current parliament has fulfilled [illegible] and in our country we do not go in proportion with the growth of the consensus development of the past 17 years. But there are obstacles blocking such elections and we hope that they will be removed and that parliamentary elections will be held as soon as possible. We should not forget that favorable conditions for these elections should also be created. [passage omitted]

[KEYSTONE] How big are the obstacles delaying elections?

[Shams al-Din] I do not want to magnify them. They are natural obstacles that have emerged as a result of the Israeli occupation, the 17-year war, and the controversies among the parties and sects in various parts of the country. There are also administrative and executive problems that need time to be solved.

We have discussed these problems frankly with the countries that are involved in the Lebanese issue, and we have said that many people have died and many have been born during the past 17 years, and that a large number of people have reached the legal age. But the country's executive and administrative bodies were not working, so it was impossible to record vital statistics. A census has started, but publishing its results will take time.

[KEYSTONE] How do you see Lebanon's political future? Will sectarianism and confessionalism be abolished, or will the situation continue as in the past?

[Shams al-Din] We accepted the al-Ta'if Accord out of necessity. The condition we set for accepting it was that it be approved within an orderly political framework so that the possibility for expanding it in the future would exist, and that it would not be within a closed framework that precluded change and expansion. This political change is actually a means to an end. In our political platforms we call for the implementation of a multiparty democracy based on the principle of a council. We consider this one of the strategic principles we adhere to in our platforms. We always stress the fact that the political criterion for choosing a competent person for sensitive positions should be the individual and not the political sect ruling Lebanon. We believe that politicians should not be chosen on the basis of their religious dependence or any of the religions and sects in the country, and that only their devotion to the homeland should be taken as a criterion. We have always called for a peaceful struggle to achieve this end, and we have opposed hostilities and the use of hostile means. You can see how the means used by all the Lebanese groups during the civil war not only failed to yield results but destroyed Lebanon and squandered the Lebanese people's potential and capabilities. To achieve these ends, we must use peaceful and democratic political processes

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